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National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Monograph on Terrorist Financing



Staff Report to the Commission

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National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

\$20,000), and potential maritime operations against oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz (approximately \$130,000). The actual operations themselves were relatively cheap, although these figures do not include such “overhead” as training at camps, evaluation of trainees, and recruitment. Although the cyclical nature of fund-raising may have created periodic cash shortfalls, we are not aware of any evidence indicating that terrorist acts were interrupted as a result.

Money for the Taliban

Once Bin Ladin revitalized his fund-raising after moving to Afghanistan, he provided funds to the Taliban in return for safe haven. Al Qaeda probably paid between \$10 to 20 million per year to the Taliban. As time passed, it appeared that the Taliban relied on al Qaeda for an ever-greater share of their needs, such as arms, goods, and vehicles, and even social projects. In return, the Taliban resisted international pressure to expel Bin Ladin or turn him over to a third country.

Money to other terrorist groups

Before 9/11 Bin Ladin appears to have used money to create alliances with other Islamic terrorist organizations. Al Qaeda’s cash contributions helped establish connections with these groups and encouraged them to share members, contacts, and facilities. It appears that al Qaeda was not funding an overall jihad program but was selectively providing start-up funds to new groups or money for specific operations. Generally, however, al Qaeda was more likely to provide logistical support and cover and to assist with terrorist operations than to provide money.

Since 9/11

Al Qaeda’s expenditures have decreased significantly since the 9/11 attacks and the defeat of the Taliban, although it is impossible to determine to what extent. Al Qaeda has become decentralized and it is unlikely that the Finance Committee still exists. Sa’id continues to operate, but given the difficulties of communication, it is doubtful that he exerts much control. The direction and financing of operations are now based more on personal relationships with operatives than on a management structure.

Al Qaeda no longer pays money to the Taliban (for safe haven or otherwise) and no longer operates extensive training camps in Afghanistan or elsewhere. It still provides operatives and their families with modest support. Al Qaeda occasionally provides funds to other terrorist organizations, especially those in Southeast Asia. Intelligence analysts estimate that al Qaeda’s operating budget may be only a few million dollars per year, although such estimates are only tentative.